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XX.—GOETHE'S ESSAY, *ÜBER LAOKOON*.

During the year 1906 the four hundredth anniversary of the finding of the marble group of Laocoön and his sons in Rome—"opus omnibus et picturae et statuariae artis praeferendum"—has been duly celebrated. The most conspicuous act in this celebration was undoubtedly Dr. Ludwig Pollak's announcement at a meeting of the German Archeological Institute¹ that he had discovered an ancient copy of the missing right arm of Laocoön, bent backward so that the hand must have been near the head, as has long been supposed. Hardly less noteworthy, however, was the effect of recent additional discoveries of inscriptions² in Rhodes that seem to fix the date of the sculptors in the middle of the first century B. C., and Richard Foerster's comprehensive article in the *Jahrbuch des archäologischen Instituts*³—the latest and most authoritative exposition of facts and expression of opinions about the statue.

Probably few works of plastic art have given rise to more discussion than the Laocoön, and certainly no other such work has played a more important part in German literature or German esthetic philosophy. From the time when Winckelmann⁴ found "den Laokoon eben so unnachahmlich als den Homer" down to our own days the statue has served as a favorite illustration of the ways and means of artistic expression, and, it may be added, has been held to corroborate

¹ Jan. 14, 1906. Cf. *Mitteilungen d. kaiserl. deutsch. archäolog. Inst.*, xx, 277, and *The Illustrated London News*, June 23, 1906, p. 902.

² F. Hiller v. Gaertringen, *Jahrb. d. arch. Inst.*, ix (1894), 23 and xx (1905), 119.

³ Vol. xxi (1906), 1 ff.

⁴ *Gedanken* (1755), DLD 20, 8.

the most various and conflicting views. Lessing, of course, did most to keep Laocoön in the foreground of esthetic speculation ; but Goethe also gave to a description and interpretation of the statue (*Über Laokoon*) the first place in a magazine by means of which he hoped to convert his fellow-countrymen to the worship of the Greek ideal, the *Propyläen* of 1798.

The apparent settlement of the more important archeological questions connected with the statue, as well as the general disposition to answer the celebrated question "Is Laocoön crying out?" in the negative, now so far assure the student of literature as to the facts that he may profitably pass judgment upon the opinions of Winckelmann, Lessing, or Goethe, and especially, it seems to me, give to Goethe's little essay closer attention than it has hitherto generally received. *Über Laokoon* is, to be sure, neither the most interesting nor the most suggestive of Goethe's essays on art. It is somewhat pompous, somewhat dogmatic ; it impresses us from the start with something of an academic character, as the expositor lays down certain first principles to serve as the basis of his discussion ; and in sundry details, indeed in his conception of the whole, Goethe was mistaken. Nevertheless, so eminent a critic as Heinrich Brunn¹ declared, "Goethes Aufsatz . . . bildet einen Glanzpunkt in der Laokoon-Literatur." No less instructive in its errors than illuminating in its presentation of many important truths, the essay is an object-lesson in how to see a statue ; and whatever value, great or small, we may attach to it as an interpretation, there can be no doubt of its significance for an understanding of Goethe's attitude towards the plastic arts in general and towards this marble group in particular. It represents Goethe at the height of his Hellenism, and he

¹ *Kleine Schriften*, Lpz., 1905, II, 506.

thought the Laocoön the masterpiece of Greek sculpture. To define what Hellenism meant for Goethe, and to see how far this statue conformed to his definition, is the purpose of this paper.

That Goethe did not always think as a Greek is well known, and the development of the "Stürmer und Dränger" into the Olympian has been traced by competent hands.¹ No more enlightening commentary on the poetic works of the successive epochs in Goethe's life can be found than the history of the poet's growth in the knowledge and appreciation of the formative arts. *Goetz* and *Werther* belong with the fervent preachments *Von deutscher Baukunst* and *Nach Falconet und über Falconet*; *Iphigenie*, *Tasso*, and *Hermann und Dorothea* move in the sphere of the serene and intellectual *Propyläen*. The man of "genius" became a man of rule; the worshipper of nature, feeling, and character became the discoverer and creator of types of humanity. The process of this transformation need not here concern us, but the fact is all-important. The Goethe who wrote² in 1772: "Und so modelt der Wilde mit abenteuerlichen Zügen, grässlichen Gestalten, hohen Farben, seine Kokos, seine Federn und seinen Körper. Und lasst die Bildnerei aus den willkürlichsten Formen bestehen, sie wird ohne Gestaltsverhältnis zusammenstimmen, denn eine Empfindung schuf sie zum charakteristischen Ganzen. Diese charakteristische Kunst ist nun die einzige wahre"—this same Goethe had discovered

¹ A. G. Meyer and G. Witkowski in their edition of *Goethes Werke*, xxx, in Kürschner's DNL; Theodor Volbehr, *Goethe und die bildende Kunst*, Lpz., 1895; L. von Urlichs, *Goethe und die Antike*, G-J, III, 3 ff; and especially Otto Harnack, *Die Klassische Ästhetik der Deutschen*, Lpz., 1892; *Goethe in der Epoche seiner Vollendung*, 2. Aufl., Lpz., 1901; *Goethes Kunstanschauung in ihrer Bedeutung f. d. Gegenwart*, in *Essays und Studien*, Braunschweig, 1899, p. 170 ff; and most recently in vol. 22 of *Goethes Werke*, in the edition of the Bibliographisches Institut, Lpz.

² *Von deutscher Baukunst*, W. A., xxxvii, 149.

in 1788 that there is another kind of art, no less genuine than the frank whimsicalities of the savage, and true in a still more significant sense than because it is the utterance of real feeling: the art whose mode of expression is *style*.¹ The artist always expresses *himself*, but the forms of his expression are forms of nature; he expresses his ideal, he fills the chosen form with a content of his own conception; but this content, this ideal, he does not evolve from his inner consciousness, it is the fruit of a penetrating and long-continued study of those natural objects whose form he adopts as a means of expression. The source of both form and content is infinite and inexhaustible nature, but the work of art is no copy of any object existing in nature. It is a free creation, in which the process of nature is imitated, and the product is the representation of a type which the artist has learned to see imperfectly represented in every individual existence in the world of sense. Thus the artist realizes the intentions of nature, which are always good,² but are thwarted by the stubbornness of material; and thus the Greeks produced in such a figure as the Venus of Melos not merely the goddess of love, but a more beautiful woman than can perhaps anywhere be actually found in the flesh—feminine beauty in typical form. Art at its best is ideal, is typical, is true. It is the objectivation of a type, true to life and yet transcending the limits of individual form. It is ideal without being unsubstantial; it is typical without being abstract; it is individual without being peculiar; it is true without being demonstrable. The artist strives not for “Naturwirklichkeit” but for “Kunstwahrheit.”³

It was to illustrate such views as these by a shining

¹ *Einfache Nachahmung der Natur, Manier, Stil*, in Wieland's *Teutscher Merkur*, Feb., 1789, W. A. XLVII, 77 ff.

² Eckermann, Apr. 18, 1827.

³ *Einleitung in die Propyläen*, W. A., XLVII, 23.

example that Goethe wrote his paper *Über Laokoon*. In 1797 Aloys Hirt¹ had contributed to Schiller's *Horen* two articles to prove that the chief merits of the statue were those of *characteristic* art, namely a wealth of peculiar, individual, one might almost say physiological traits. Goethe replied by insisting upon the significance of the figures as *types*, and desired at the same time "auf die Intention der Künstler, die dieses Werk verfertigten, genauer als es bisher geschehen, aufmerksam zu machen."²

Accordingly Goethe described the subject here treated as a tragic idyll: a father with his two sons, surprised while asleep, is in danger of being killed by two serpents. These are no divine agents of destruction, but natural creatures, and the victims are human beings shorn of every other characteristic than strength and comeliness of person, and membership in one and the same family. Laocoön is a mere name; the man so called is not presented to us as a Trojan priest, but as a typical father. The situation is likewise nothing more

¹ Cf. G-J, xv, 100 ff., and Harnack, *Klass. Ästhetik*, 177 ff.; likewise Scholl in these *Publications*, xxi (1906), 118 f. Scholl correctly reports Goethe's attitude before the appearance of Hirt's articles but does not give quite the right impression of the change after their appearance. It is true that Goethe was glad to see the prevalent notions about the lifeless coldness of Greek sculpture dispelled by Hirt; but his references to the "Dogmatiker" in the letter to Meyer of July 14, 1797 (cited by Scholl), are not exactly in a sympathetic tone; and his subsequent treatment of the "Charakteristiker" in "Der Sammler und die Seinigen," 5. *Brief, Propyläen*, l. c., 160 ff., is no less contemptuous than Friedrich Schlegel's in the *Athenäum*. Goethe succinctly formulated his conception of the place of the characteristic in art in the *Sammler* (l. c. 163): "Das Charakteristische liegt zum Grunde, auf ihm ruhen Einfachheit und Würde; das höchste Ziel der Kunst ist Schönheit und ihre letzte Wirkung Gefühl der Anmut" —and to this doctrine Winckelmann himself would have subscribed. Scholl might have adduced O. Harnack's *Klassiker und Romantiker, Essays und Studien*, 270 ff., as well as Minor's article with the same title.

² Goethe's own *Anzeige der Propyläen*, *Allgem. Zeitung*, Apr. 29, 1799, W. A. XLVII, 38.

than a scene in human life : attack, defence, triumph, and defeat in a combat between unequal foes. The sculptors may be illustrating a myth, but they have represented an action that is complete in itself, with natural causes and effects, and without any suggestion of mythology. Their statue is a work of art, skilfully composed to secure the maximum of artistic effect, and appealing to the observer with the sensuous charm exercised by every embodiment of an idea in forms of beauty. The artists have proved their wisdom by their choice of the moment to be represented : it is the climax of the action, and can endure in this effectiveness but an instant ; it is a moment when the three victims are discovered at three different stages of danger : the father is being bitten, the younger son is about to be bitten, the elder son is ensnared but as yet unharmed. The spectator is filled with terror at the plight of the father, he fears a similar fate for the younger boy, he is touched by the sympathetic horror with which the elder boy regards the suffering of his father, but is not without hope that this lad may escape destruction. The cause of this momentary action is the bite of the serpent in Laocoön's hip, but the effect is not merely physical pain ; Laocoön's feeling is the woe of a father who exerts himself to the utmost but is helpless to defend his sons. His fate is tragic, as is life itself ; it is not horrible, like that of Milo of Crotona, entrapped in a tree-trunk and devoured by a lion ; and through the hope that remains for the elder son there is even in this sudden and undeserved calamity at least an element of consolation.

Before proceeding to an examination of this interpretation, we may well consider one or two propositions of general purport in the arts which Goethe makes by the way. He says :¹ “ Wenn ein Werk der bildenden Kunst sich wirk-

¹ *Über Laok.*, W. A. XLVII, 107.

lich vor dem Auge bewegen soll, so muss ein vorübergehender Moment gewählt sein; kurz vorher darf kein Teil des Ganzen sich in dieser Lage befunden haben, kurz nachher muss jeder Teil genötigt sein, diese Lage zu verlassen; dadurch wird das Werk Millionen Anschauern immer wieder neu lebendig sein." And again: ¹ "Hier sei mir eine Bemerkung erlaubt, die für die bildende Kunst von Wichtigkeit ist: der höchste pathetische Ausdruck, den sie darstellen kann, schwebt auf dem Übergange eines Zustandes in den anderen." By "pathetisch" Goethe means "leidenschaftlich," that is, passionate, emotional, highly animated; and it might seem as if he expected "movement" only in the expression of emotion and passion, having only one sort of subject in mind. But passion, vivacity, movement, immediate, even momentary effectiveness, were the qualities that he especially admired in a statue, ² and he is speaking above of the highest type of sculpture. Lessing, too, had the highest type of sculpture in mind when he defined the limits of "painting" and poetry; he, too, laid stress on the necessity of selecting the most "fruitful moment" for representation. But Lessing declared that in plastic art nothing must be expressed which can be conceived only as transitory. ³ Herder had already ⁴ vehemently protested against this attempt to restrict sculpture to the imitation of quiescent, that is, dead bodies; maintaining that the artist would thereby be deprived of his best means of expression, and that Lessing's reason for his rule was derived not from any principle of art, but from

¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

² "Wenn wir uns genau beobachten, so finden wir, dass Bildwerke uns vorzüglich nach Massgabe der vorgestellten Bewegung interessieren." *Reizmittel in der bildenden Kunst*, W. A. XLIX, 32.

³ *Laokoon*, ed. Blümner, Berlin², 1880, III, 165.

⁴ *Erstes Kritisches Wäldchen* (1769), IX; *Werke*, ed. Suphan, Berlin, 1877 ff., III, 74 ff.

the limitations of human capacity to enjoy. Lessing argued, since art gives to a momentary aspect an unnatural permanency, a smile which at first sight is pleasant to behold becomes, if prolonged, a grimace from which we turn away in disgust. Herder answered, Yes; but should a smiling face never be represented because in the long run we become surfeited with the sight of it? May it not be preserved so as to give pleasure to thousands who are to see it but once? Goethe's attitude on this question is evidently similar to Herder's. He too enjoyed the stimulus of action arrested, petrified, so to speak, in marble, and yet seeming about to continue and lead in the next instant to new attitudes and new expressions.

It is easy to see how Lessing was brought to the exclusion of the transitory from sculpture and painting. If action is the domain of poetry and the representation of bodies is the business of "painting," then movement, transition, belong to poetry, and immobility, intransitoriness are the qualities of subjects suitable for the formative arts. Though we may not accept this precept as a principle,¹ it is none the less easy to see that a painter or a sculptor does well to avoid extremes in the use of the privilege of suggesting motion—a privilege that Lessing by no means denied him.² The rearing horse of Falconet's Peter the Great at St. Petersburg is certainly more hazardous in a colossal statue than the horse with one forefoot raised in Schlüter's statue of the Great Elector in Berlin—yet one attitude is no more or less transitory than the other. Upon long acquaintance you may

¹ "Man hat der Plastik geraten, Bewegungen möglichst zu vermeiden, ruhende Stellungen aufzusuchen; aber die Geschichte lehrt, dass zu allen Zeiten nicht nur Maler sondern auch Bildhauer ihrem innern Drange folgend sich daran wagten, lebhaft bewegte Momente darzustellen." Ernst Brücke, *Die Darstellung der Bewegung durch die bildenden Künste, Deutsche Rundschau*, xxvi (1881), 39.

² *Laok.*, xvi, 251.

easily find the smiling Saskia of Rembrandt "fatal,"¹ and yet wish to have preserved in a picture the appearance of a young woman who, standing in the frame of a doorway, turns half around and is about to speak pleasantly to a person in the room that she is just leaving—and this moment is even more fleeting than Saskia's smile. Circumstances evidently govern cases even in such matters and, as Ziehen points out,² so elementary a consideration as the size of a picture may determine the propriety of suggested motion. If, however, the suggestion of motion under appropriate circumstances is admissible, Lessing cannot on principle exclude the transitory from the formative arts; and if Theodor Dahmen³ is right in holding that the effect of all arts is always to induce in the observer the muscular sensations of motion along the lines of force in a picture, and that every picture or even diagram has such lines and stimulates such sensations, then clearly the suggestion of motion by the representation of transitory states involves a question of degree and not of kind; and Herder is right in asserting that Lessing went too far in the direction of rigidity and lifelessness.

But Goethe went too far in the other direction. Lessing wrote:⁴ "Dasjenige aber nur allein ist fruchtbar, was der Einbildungskraft freies Spiel lässt. Je mehr wir sehen, desto mehr müssen wir hinzudenken können. Je mehr wir dazudenken, desto mehr müssen wir zu sehen glauben. In dem ganzen Verfolge eines Affekts ist aber kein Augenblick, der diesen Vorteil weniger hat, als die höchste Staffel des-

¹ Cf. Julius Ziehen, *Kunstgeschichtliches Anschauungsmaterial zu Lessings Laokoon*, Bielefeld und Lpz., 1905, pp. 24, 28.

² *L. c.*, p. 30.

³ *Die Theorie des Schönen. Von dem Bewegungsprinzip abgeleitete Ästhetik*, Lpz., 1903.

⁴ *Laok.*, III, 165.

selben. Über ihr ist weiter nichts, und dem Auge das Äusserste zeigen, heisst der Phantasie die Flügel binden." Goethe says,¹ to be sure, "ein Letztes soll nicht dargestellt werden," meaning that the sculptors would not have chosen to represent the younger son of Laocoön as already at the point of death; but he speaks of "der Gipfel des vorgestellten Augenblicks" as "ein grosser Vorzug dieses Kunstwerks,"² declares "die Bildhauerkunst wird mit Recht so hoch gehalten, weil sie die Darstellung auf ihren höchsten Gipfel bringen kann und muss,"³ and cannot praise too warmly the "Mass, womit das Extrem eines physischen und geistigen Leidens hier dargestellt ist."⁴

Here again, as when speaking of "movement," we must be careful to give no wrench to Goethe's meaning. That the climax of expression and the extreme of suffering which he saw in Laocoön left him abundant scope for the exercise of imagination is apparent from his analysis of the statue. It might seem, therefore, that his doctrine was in no wise inconsistent with Lessing's on this point. Another passage in Goethe's essay proves, however, that he exaggerated the possibility of the plastic expression of passion in the same way that Lessing unduly restricted the possibility of the plastic expression of motion. Goethe writes:⁵ "Der Mensch hat bei eignen und fremden Leiden nur drei Empfindungen: Furcht, Schrecken und Mitleiden; das bange Voraussehen eines sich annähernden Übels, das unerwartete Gewahrwerden gegenwärtigen Leidens, und die Teilnahme am dauernden oder vergangenem. . . . Die bildende Kunst, die immer für den Moment arbeitet, wird, sobald sie einen pathetischen Gegenstand wählt, denjenigen ergreifen, der Schrecken erweckt, dahingegen Poesie sich an solche hält, die Furcht und

¹ *Über Laok.*, 114.

² *Ibid.*, 113.

³ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁵ *L. c.*, 114.

Mitleiden erregen." Lessing, who took such pains¹ to establish the translation "Furcht" for the Aristotelian φόβος, would to some extent at least have sympathized with this distinction between the subjects of sculpture and of poetry; and Goethe's definition of fear, with its implied element of succession of moments in time, marks this emotion as belonging in the realm of that art whose "symbols" are successive words.² But the whole trend of Goethe's sentence is in opposition to Lessing. From beginning to end of the *Laokoon* Lessing insists "dass die Poesie die weitere Kunst ist;"³ Goethe in this sentence holds that the highest degree of fear is proper only for sculpture; and on the same grounds he doubts whether the fate of Laocoön is suitable for literary treatment at all.⁴ Be the case as it may with regard to this latter doubt; there are plenty of examples of "terror" at any rate in dramatic poetry: Hamlet, for instance, in the presence of the Ghost—to say nothing of Kleist's Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, cowed by the phantom of ignominious and supposedly undeserved death. And as to sculpture, would a tiger stealthily creeping up to its unsuspecting victim, or crouching and about to spring, be a less suggestive subject than a tiger with a struggling victim in its jaws? Is the struggling Laocoön so fascinating because we see him at the climax of his struggle and his pain? Goethe's answer is clear and positive: "Plastik wirkt eigentlich nur auf ihrer höchsten Stufe."⁵ But this answer is too sweeping and is comprehensible only in the light of Goethe's overgreat fondness for the stimulus of emotion and passion. There was a strain of romanticism even in the blood of the classicist.

¹ *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, 74. Stück.

² *Laok.*, xvi, 250 ff.

³ *Laok.*, viii, 211.

⁴ *Über Laok.*, 117.

⁵ *Maximen und Reflexionen*, W. A., XLVIII, 193.

In his interpretation of the statue, however, Goethe speaks as an out-and-out classicist—more of a classicist than the sculptors themselves. The group does not, as a matter of fact, represent a “tragic idyll;” it is not a typical scene from human life; it is the very special punishment of the Trojan priest Laocoön for a special offence against Apollo.¹ Laocoön was distinguished as a priest by a laurel-wreath of bronze, traces of which can be seen in a groove about his head,² also by the altar upon which he is pressed back, and near which he and his sons would scarcely have chosen to lie down and sleep. His resistance to the serpents is not so much resolute self-defence as it is an instinctive but convulsive and ineffective reaction upon a sudden attack. He knows that he is guilty and realizes whence the punishment comes. The expression of his face is the anguish of physical suffering and remorse. Furthermore, in the composition of their group, which is indeed admirable, the sculptors showed less refinement than Goethe attributed to them. The three victims do in fact appear in three degrees of danger, but not in just the way that Goethe conceived. The father is being bitten, as Goethe says—and he describes the physiological effect of the bite with telling accuracy—but the younger son has already been bitten and his state is “ein Letztes.” This is clear from his whole attitude: the hanging head, the relaxation of the muscles of the legs, the probable dropping of the right arm (now incorrectly restored, like the father’s) in the direction of his head. Were he not held up by the

¹ Servius *ad Aen.*, II, 201, citing Euphron says of Laocoön: hic piaculum commiserat ante simulacrum numinis cum Antiopa sua uxore coeundo. Cf. Foerster, *l. c.*, p. 13.

² Cf. W. Helbig, *Führer durch die öffentlichen Sammlungen klassischer Altertümer in Rom*, Lpz.², 1899, I, p. 87; and Karl Sittl, *Empirische Studien über die Laokoongruppe*, Würzburg, 1895, p. 32; also Foerster, *l. c.*, p. 23: “Denn er trägt einen Lorbeerkrantz. Auch die Früchte sind an demselben, wie ich am Original feststellen konnte, plastisch gearbeitet.”

serpent he would fall to the ground. Goethe's error in his conception of this figure was due partly to his theory of the gradation of danger, but originally and chiefly, no doubt, to the fact that he regarded the head of the serpent biting the boy as an unsuccessful restoration, whereas it is original, but ambiguous.¹ It being more or less concealed under the boy's hand, the sculptors "scamped" it, and trusted that the obvious effect on the boy would indicate that the serpent had already bitten him. In the frontispiece to the first volume of the *Propyläen*, an engraving of the group, Goethe caused this head to be brought farther forward than it really is, so that the serpent's mouth should be seen to be tightly closed: "Keineswegs aber beisst sie."² Concerning the elder son and the possibility of his escape, modern opinions have differed and must differ so long as they are based upon the evidence of the statue itself. Heinrich Brunn³ pointed out that the boy is now turning half away from his father; that only the tail of one serpent encircles his ankle, which, since the serpent is moving in the opposite direction, will soon be freed; and that the boy will then be restrained from flight only by the coil of the other serpent about his right arm, from which also he can quite conceivably extricate himself. Hugo Blümner,⁴ on the contrary, called attention to the probability that the serpent now biting Laocoön would in the next instant turn upon the elder son before he could get away, so that he also must perish, and the tragedy which in the scene before us appears in three stages—past (the younger son), present (the father), and future (the elder

¹ Cf. Sittl, *l. c.*, p. 35.

² *Über Laok.*, 108.

³ *L. c.*, 502 ff. Brunn wrote two articles on Laocoön: the first the "new interpretation" criticized by Blümner, the second a reply to Blümner and fuller exposition of his own views.

⁴ *Eine neue Deutung der Laokoongruppe*, *Neue Jahrbücher für Philologie und Pädagogik*, LI (1881), 17 ff.

son)—would then be complete. To this argument Brunn replied: ¹ the serpents, moving as they do from right to left (from the spectator's point of view) have both passed by the elder son without as yet injuring him. If they were especially sent to punish the father and the younger son, the fruit of his offence, they might disappear as suddenly as they came, and leave the elder son, who is now a spectator, then alone a witness to the stern justice of the gods.

When interpreting the statue, we have to reckon, as Brunn did, ² with the possibility that the sculptors, for all their indebtedness to mythology and tradition, were artists, and as such were free to modify mythological tradition in the interest of their work. To me this seems indeed highly improbable. It is all the more to be regretted that the mythological tradition has come down to us in fragmentary and contradictory forms. There is now no question that the sculptors did not imitate Virgil, as Lessing thought was possible. ³ But whose version of the story is to be regarded as their source? Arctinus in the *Iliupersis* described the death of Laocoön and one of his sons; Sophocles—to mention only one other name—is reported by Dionysius of Halicarnassus to have represented in his lost tragedy the death of all three. Foerster ⁴ discusses this and other literary evidence, and shows from relics of the lesser arts—a scarab and a vase—that the pictorial representation of the death of all three is as old as the fifth century B. C. It is to be presumed that the sculptors did not depart from this tradition, especially since it had the authority of Sophocles, and the fact that the action takes place before an altar and not, as in some Greek accounts, when Laocoön is among the feasting Trojans, justifies the conclusion that the fault for

¹ *L. c.*, 516 f.

² *L. c.*, 509 f.

³ *Laok.*, v, 181 ff.

⁴ *L. c.*, 13 ff.

which he is punished is that attributed to him by Euphorion. The punishment ensued at the scene of the crime. Foerster makes it probable that this *motif* was quite ancient, and that something of the kind must have been Laocoön's tragic guilt in the play of Sophocles. But after all, the one important consideration for us is rather that those for whom the statue was made could have had no doubt as to what it stood for. Every Greek who saw it knew that it illustrated the story of Laocoön, and presumably admired it chiefly for the marvellous technical skill of the sculptors. Pliny, the men of the Renaissance, Goethe, and his contemporaries, admired it for other reasons. The statue has fallen in the estimation of our generation because we have learned more about Greek art than Goethe could possibly know. Friedrich Hebbel was no connoisseur of sculpture, but he with true insight expressed the point of view that is also ours when he wrote:¹

"Vor dem Laokoon

"Michel Angelo hiess als Wunder der Kunst dich willkommen,
Weil du als Gegengewicht gegen den schönen Apoll,
Der den Raphael trug und ihn verneinte, ihm dientest ;
Mancher sprach es ihm nach, aber er sagte zu viel.
Was die Wahrheit vermag, das zeigst du deutlich, o Gruppe,
Deutlicher zeigst du jedoch, dass sie nicht alles vermag !"

No man knew better than Goethe the insufficiency of naturalistic methods in the fine arts. He valued the Laocoön because in his opinion it was not merely true to nature. The presuppositions of his admiration are in large measure the criteria of our judgment. But the works that we admire conform to these canons better than the statue by which Goethe thought they were justified and from which he thought they could be derived.

WILLIAM GUILD HOWARD.

¹ *Werke*, ed. Werner, Berlin, 1901 ff., vi, 334.